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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000573

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN'S NORTH: OVEREDUCATED AND OVERLOOKED

REF: DUSHANBE 512

11. (SBU) Summary: During multiple trips to the northern city of Khujand, Emboffs have noticed an increasing sense of disenfranchisement among the well-educated and cosmopolitan population. The near-complete absence of northerners in the Government, and the recent harsh winter conditions during which the north received little support from Dushanbe, have pushed even more Khujanders to seek opportunities in Russia and elsewhere. End summary.

From Manufacturing to Marginalization

12. (SBU) Khujand, with six hundred thousand residents, is Tajikistan's second-largest city and the administrative center of the Sugd region, which includes Tajikistan's chunk of the Fergana Valley. During the Soviet Union when Khujand was called Leninabad, almost all leaders of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic were from the north. A uranium ("Tajik Gold") processing plant in nearby Chkalovsk provided well-paying jobs for scientists and laborers, many of whom arrived from Russia, Germany and Belarus during Stalin's forced migrations. The likeness of Bobojon Gafurov, a Khujand native and well-known Soviet-era historian, is displayed on posters and statues throughout the city.

13. (SBU) During the civil war of 1993-1997, President Nabiev, a Khujand native, was forcibly removed from office and returned home, bringing his circle of advisors and loyalists with him. Few would ever return to Dushanbe. Meanwhile, the vast majority of Germans, Belarussians and Jews, representing the educated segment of society in Khujand emigrated to the West, and the uranium plant closed.

14. (SBU) President Rahmon, a native of a small town south of Dushanbe, continues to pack his cabinet and senior positions throughout the Government with relatives and loyalists. Many area natives who had been living in Dushanbe have returned and are underemployed, given Khujand's lack of civil service and international organization jobs.

A Different Atmosphere

15. (SBU) Khujanders tend to view Dushanbe as a town of peasants (including the President himself). Despite a miniscule expatriate presence in Khujand, foreigners receive fewer stares and find many English-speakers to converse with. In Khujand, unlike Dushanbe, luxury imported SUVs do not terrorize pedestrians and drivers alike. Additionally, there are almost none of the comically inept traffic policemen who incessantly demand bribes from Dushanbe motorists.

16. (SBU) While Rahmon's government has not invested in many large-scale construction projects in Khujand, it has decorated the city with a large quantity of cult-of-personality art. A giant

television screen on a major intersection plays round-the-clock footage of the President engaged in benevolent acts, while banners of his smiling visage hang from almost all public buildings. The irony is not lost on residents.

17. (SBU) During the recent unusually cold winter, Khujand suffered from power cuts more extensive than those in the capital. Not only was there power for less than four hours a day in January, but running water was limited due to low levels in the Karakkum reservoir outside of the city. Only one building in town - a hotel owned by a government minister - had continuous power. Guests were ordered to use minimal lights and keep curtains drawn at night in order to avoid angering jealous neighbors. Even in early April, the city still experienced daily power cuts.
Qcity still experienced daily power cuts.

Why Stay?

18. (SBU) Many northerners are seeking opportunities elsewhere. Crossing the border to Uzbekistan, 45 minutes drive from Khujand, is difficult and expensive. A resident told Emboff that daily flights to Moscow (which cost \$650) are full, but the return flights are almost totally empty. Students consistently express a wish to leave. Sugd region residents make up more than 40 percent of our exchange program alumni, but only a handful have returned to their hometown.

19. (SBU) Comment: Despite a history stretching back to Alexander the Great and a young, well-educated workforce, Khujand doesn't seem to matter to the current government. If migration continues at the current pace, the city will soon lose most of its educated and economically active residents, furthering its decline. End comment.

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